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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MASERU 000051

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FOR AF/S

E.O. 12958: DECL: 1/30/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [LT](#)
SUBJECT: JANUARY 29 SHOOTING OF LESOTHO'S FOREIGN MINISTER

REF: MASERU 35

CLASSIFIED BY: JUNE CARTER PERRY, AMBASSADOR, EXEC, STATE.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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Summary

1. (SBU) Local employee informed Embassy duty officer (DCM) at 10:30 am, Sunday, January 29 of rumored shooting of Foreign Affairs Minister Moleleki as he approached his residence gate. Once alerted, AMB called the Foreign Minister at 10:40, received no response on home or cell numbers, then contacted senior Cabinet minister (finance) who was unaware of incident. Police confirmed incident with EMBOFFS at 10:55 citing FOMIN had been brought in for a gunshot wound to the left arm. Minister of Finance elaborated in telecon with AMB that as the FOMIN's car approached his gate around 2 - 3 am, following a national political party conference, his body guard alighted to find the guards; the Minister was then assaulted by two armed gunmen with Israeli military weapons. Per AMB's telecon with FOMIN's wife, a physician, he was taken to the Makoayane Military Hospital (with three bullet wounds to the arm) for treatment where she said he would remain until Wednesday, February 1. Finance Minister reported Sunday afternoon that the Deputy Prime Minister would make a statement for public consumption to ensure stability. The DPM is also the Minister of Home Affairs and Public Safety. Although the 18:00 news broadcast of Sunday, 1/29 referenced "a shooting incident involving the Minister of Foreign Affairs," there was no public statement read or released. The DPM advised AMB on 1/30 that he considered the incident a "grave" one and that he did intend to provide a statement to the public and to the diplomatic corps. The EU and South African missions have the same information at this time as we do. No Acting Foreign Minister has been named.

2. (C) Moleleki is the linchpin on several major bilateral and multilateral issues. Any time he must take away from his duties will not only impact AU and UN decisions by the GOL, but could hinder progress toward an Article 98 Agreement and a Millennium Challenge Compact. Moleleki's "out front" role in the ruling LCD party has been the subject of debate as potential candidates for the top spot in the 2007 National Elections juggle for space. The January 27-29 Party Conference reinstated Prime Minister Mosisili as party head and FOMIN Moleleki as Editor of the LCD's paper. Discontent has been evident since the 2005 December party conference where Former Home Affairs and current Minister of Communications Minister Thabane was expected to strengthen his hand. It appears Moleleki and the PM ironed out

any differences they may have had, but the FOMIN's grassroots popularity may not provide ironclad protection. End Summary

Post Conference Shooting

13. (C) Lesotho's ruling political party (Lesotho Congress for Democracy) began its January 27 conference already facing dissent within the ranks. It ended with bullet wounds to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Monyane Moleleki. The January 29 shooting had been preceded by the brief arrests (January 22) of youth leaders supporting Minister of Communications Tom Thabane. Allegedly, the youth league was disseminating leaflets critical of Prime Minister Mosisili. (The young members were detained 48 hours and released.) Thabane had been touted, along with Moleleki, as a potential contender for the party's top job. FOMIN Moleleki told Ambassador that, following the December meeting, things were going well and the LCD party mechanisms were in place. He exhibited a spirit of confidence and felt the leadership would continue essentially unchanged. In the end, those elected during the second party congress (septel) did not reflect major shifts and the results support Moleleki's predictions.

14. (C) Nevertheless, some within the LCD viewed Moleleki as a threat to Mosisili himself. As previously reported, the FOMIN (former Information Minister) is a charismatic speaker who has attracted support from young men and women alike. According to Finance Minister Thabane, Moleleki's outspoken style and popularity caused tensions with the PM. Reportedly, the January 27 party congress speeches were contentious ones with the leadership touting unity, but dissatisfied factions continued to feel left out of the process. In his role as editor of the party newspaper and as a highly visible political leader, Moleleki may have provided the perfect target. A senior Cabinet officer suggested to us January 29, that the party's bickering

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had led to the attack on the FOMIN. The Deputy Prime Minister, characterizing the shooting as a "grave" situation told Ambassador the matter was still "under investigation." He promised that an explanation and statement for the public and for diplomatic missions would be forthcoming.

15. (C) According to Minister Moleleki's wife (a physician and head of the Lesotho Red Cross), he will remain in the military hospital until February 1. It is unclear what his work schedule will be once released. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is already suffering staff shortage without a Principal Secretary. Moleleki has been the designated hitter (by the PM) on working out language for an Article 98 Agreement. He has also taken a leading role in moving along a revised Millennium Challenge proposal. As former Minister of Natural Resources, he was deeply engaged in Lesotho's first proposal concepts and has played an important liaison role between involved Ministries on the GOL's MCC team. One expects he will continue to apply his influence in these two areas. However, whatever the nature of its origin, the attack on him must be viewed as a warning. He may still be viewed as a threat no matter how forcefully the unity argument is put. (Note: The situation in Maseru and the rest of the country has remained calm.)

Comment

16. (C) Further details on the Moleleki incident are expected, but we do not believe the overall political map will be radically redrawn. What must be considered is the fact that there exists a more-than-vocal opposition movement that views the Mosisili government as unresponsive to its needs. The public remains one plagued by unemployment, AIDS and drought. The LCD, while certainly supporting donor efforts to address these health and development problems, is not perceived as having reversed the ordinary Masotho's fortunes. One of the Party's key assets is, indeed, Moleleki himself. With a retro Afro, safari shirts and a willingness to show up in villages

regularly, he has tapped a vein of expectation and hope. The LCD will have to make serious efforts to reach out to voters across the economic spectrum before the March 2007 elections. International interlocutors anticipate Moleleki's return to MFA, but may expect delayed action on some of their major concerns.
End Comment.
PERRY